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Fifty-third session
Agenda items 20, 105 and 110
STRENGTHENING OF THE COORDINATION OF
HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RELIEF
ASSISTANCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS,
INCLUDING SPECIAL ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE
REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH
COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES: QUESTIONS
RELATING TO REFUGEES AND DISPLACED
PERSONS AND HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS

SECURITY COUNCIL
Fifty-fourth year

Letter dated 19 February 1999 from the Permanent Representative of Eritrea to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit a press release issued on 14 February 1999 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Eritrea concerning the human suffering inflicted upon Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin in Ethiopian prison camps (see annex). The Government of Ethiopia is continuing to grossly violate the human rights of Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin with impunity. My Government strongly urges immediate action by the international community to reverse this criminal practice.

I should be grateful if you would kindly circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly, under agenda items 20, 105 and 110, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Haile MENKERIOS
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

Annex

Press release of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Eritrea
issued on 14 February 1999

The Tigre People's Liberation Front cannot "clean it's record" overnight

The Tigre People's Liberation Front regime has released thirty-eight Eritrean exchange students from its prison camps. This is too little too late. The students languished in these brutal camps for eight months enduring beatings, poor conditions and lack of medical and humanitarian attention. One of the students, Gebrekidan Zecharias, died in detention. 1,500 Eritrean civilians are still imprisoned in Ethiopian concentration camps and their death toll continues to rise.

These students should have never been touched; neither should the 1,500 young Eritreans who remain in detention in Blattein and other isolated prison camps around Ethiopia. The Eritreans who remain in detention are accused of being a security risk because some of them have completed their national service in Eritrea.

The actions of the Tigre People's Liberation Front regime in this regard are beyond the pale. This was not a reprisal or retribution. Indeed, the Eritrean Government allowed Ethiopian students in the same exchange programme to sit for their final exams before flying them back to Addis Ababa. This meant nothing to the Tigre People's Liberation Front regime. They have had a free hand with which to execute systematic repression of anyone with Eritrean connections and no retroactive pretence can exonerate them from the fact that they have destroyed thousands of lives and families for political gain. What will Ethiopia say to the family of Gebrekidan Zecharias? Indeed, what will they say to the families of thousands of Eritrean civilians who remain in remote prison camps in Ethiopia?

How can this have happened? How can a Government that openly violates human rights and flagrantly unleashes its vengeance on innocent civilians continue to be pampered? How can the international community have turned their eyes from the unthinkable acts that were happening to people in their offices, in their neighbourhoods, in their care and even in their homes?

The Tigre People's Liberation Front Government has worked harder to shatter the relations of Eritreans and Ethiopians than any other Government in our common history ever has. They have displayed a savage lack of scruples. Those who have said nothing and who have thought it suitable to deal with the Tigre People's Liberation Front while they committed these acts must hold themselves responsible as well.

The Tigre People's Liberation Front is using the confusion its current military offensive has created to "creep out the back door" on heinous crimes it has committed. Their guise is completely transparent. A solitary and insincere apology here, a long overdue concession there, and now they hope that overnight

that they can clean a record tarnished by a public policy of persecution of innocent Eritreans. The international community must not tolerate this gimmick and should demand the release of the 1,500 innocent Eritrean civilians who remain in the Tigre People's Liberation Front's concentration camps.